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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a Laramie County, Wyoming, program to deliver transition information and skills to handicapped students in sparsely populated rural communities. A brief historical review of education in Wyoming precedes a discussion of transition concerns in Wyoming which include lack of coordination between educational and community agencies and lack of case management services. The cooperative program, initiated by the Wyoming Handicapped Youth Employment Project (WHYTEP), involves nine agencies including the Laramie County Community College, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Association for Retarded Citizens as well as the school system. The first step, implementation, involved preparation of three video tapes to provide information about vocational options for students, parents, and school personnel. The second step, strategies, involved funding a school resource specialist and job coach to work directly with students the summer following graduation to facilitate the transition from school to work. The third phase, case management, involved developing a transition team to provide coordinated follow-up services to the client for the indefinite future. The project also developed a special needs vocational advisory committee, career development teams to develop career education activities for handicapped students beginning in the 7th grade, and work study teams to place and support older students in community jobs. (DB)

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Transition Team Building: In School and Beyond

As the need for better transition became apparent, we in Wyoming were determined to improve our resource room delivery system and agency referral process to provide more vocational opportunities for handicapped students.

However, our school districts are largely autonomous so it was necessary to involve many people in the planning and program development of services delivered to handicapped students who are preparing for work.

We want to share some of the ways that we helped deliver transition information and skills to our district and then to teachers and agencies in a sparsely populated state--Cheyenne is the capitol and has some 12,200 total students--the largest school system in the state. Most school districts have 500 or less students.

Laramie County School District #1 and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation developed a partnership to get this process going which included a variety of team building situations. First local and then statewide in-service was held and information on the transition team building concept that follows was disseminated to rural areas through mailings from our district and the University of Wyoming.

HISTORICAL LOOK AT EDUCATION IN WYOMING

In 1867, it was reported to the Dakota Territory Superintendent of Public Instruction that there were in Cheyenne some 200 children between the ages of 5 and 21 and no school facilities. On January 5, 1868, with the temperature a cool 23 degrees below zero, the citizens of Cheyenne dedicated the first school building.

The first school law (in what was now called Wyoming Territory) became effective on December 10, 1869.

What we might call one of our first Vocational Education and Living Skills programs was started in 1875 at the Rectory School House, a private institution for children between ages 6 and 12. At this school, Miss Annie

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Delany conducted "a class for little girls in sewing, embroidery, miniature dress making and general deportment."[1]

The residents of Wyoming pioneer communities were so eager for schools they made use of anything available to help provide education and training to their children. One school in the Shell Creek area (North Central Wyoming) opened an abandoned stable where children sat on the manger. A pair of old rubber boots was split open and tacked on the wall for a blackboard.

Cheyenne had the first high school in 1875. By 1940, the State Department of Education had a well established Vocational Education program in many communities. Practical courses were given in Agriculture, Home Economics, Trade and Industry, Rehabilitation and Americanization. Also by 1940, much attention was given in Wyoming to the special education of all classes of handicapped children, including bind, deaf, crippled and mentally retarded.

As you can see, historically, Wyoming schools have done a good job developing programs, especially since achieving statehood in 1890. But modern times call for modern programs. Many of us felt the state was not keeping up with the demands and needs of our population of special needs children.

TRANSITION CONCERNS STATEWIDE

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation recognized the need and funded the Wyoming Handicapped Youth Transition Employment Project (WHYTEP) in 1984. A survey conducted by this project confirmed the need for what we have called "transition services". It was discovered that a large number of handicapped youth do not make contact with service providers or do not receive services to aid their movement into post high school training, employment and independent living, and many of these same youths end up being placed on waiting lists for adult programs and/or remain dependent unproductive members of society.

In October 1985, the Wyoming Council on Developmental Disabilities, on behalf of WHYTEP distributed a request for proposals addressing the needs identified through the survey. Key to the request was that the proposals needed to be cooperative community demonstration projects, and should include (1) functional curriculum development and implementation; (2) development and implementation of strategies for follow-up and support services; (3) development and implementation of case management. These corresponded to efforts already being made by each separate agency and school, but were efforts and programs which were not being coordinated by these groups.

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[1]Wyoming: A Guide to Histories, Highways and People, Federal Writers Project, University of Nebraska Press, 1981.

A good example of this lack of coordination was the fact that the local school district had a functional curriculum already written (Spring of 1985) and had been planning to implement it soon. The schools were doing some follow-up and support services with employed youth but because of funding problems were not able to do continuous summer follow-up, consequently, employed students lost their support person, who was crucial to their success in the work place during the summer. In addition to this, agencies, such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) have a policy and philosophy of not duplicating services which are seen as being the responsibility of the school. They prefer, and indeed federal regulations support the idea of not finding a person eligible for services unless they are ready and able to participate in training or long term employment. Students are not usually prepared for this--either they do not have the prevocational skills or they need to continue their education, i.e., they are not ready for graduation.

Developmental disabilities facilities in Wyoming, such as Magic City Enterprises and Goodwill of Wyoming, both located in Cheyenne, Wyoming, provide evaluation and work adjustment programs at the request of schools or agencies but the extent is limited by school scheduling and many times is not carried on after the student leaves the school setting through graduation or drop out.

Case management is provided to every client of DVR and most other agencies but many times a student waits until their need is almost desperate or other resources are depleted before applying to community service providers. The agency then may have trouble obtaining the necessary records from the school because of the length of time after graduation or drop out, and must duplicate services that had already been provided--such as vocational evaluations, psychological testing and more work adjustment because the student/client has not retained the skills through lack of practice and/or use. From an economic perspective this is not cost effective to anyone--tax payer, state agency, client or school district.

As stated previously, many persons who would be eligible for community services never contact the agencies. This may be because of pride or lack of information about services. The results of this lack of total communication, cooperation and follow through--even though each individual entity (schools, DVR, community programs) were doing their jobs was often misunderstandings on the part of professionals and a loss to the disabled youth in terms of earning potential, as well as a loss to the tax payer through financial assistance programs and dependency by the youth for extended lengths of time.

THE PROPOSAL: A LARAMIE COUNTY PARTNERSHIP

A cooperative proposal was prepared and submitted to WHYTEP and funded. Participating in the planning and writing of the proposal were Laramie County Community College, Magic City Enterprises, the

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Association for Retarded Citizens, Goodwill of Wyoming (Vocational and Living Skills personnel), School District #1 Special Education and Vocational Education staff, Job Service of Wyoming, (Laramie County office personnel), Community Action, School District #2 of Laramie County, parents, students and employers.

It is important to note at this point that Laramie County may be unique. Those persons who cooperated on the project all have a background of working with the identified age group; have all been in the county for extended periods of time as professionals, all knew each other professionally from previous contacts; and all wanted to see services improved.

The proposal was written in three parts to meet all areas WHYTEP had designated. Included in the first step, IMPLEMENTATION, was the preparation of three video tapes which provided information about vocational options for students, parents, and school personnel. These increased awareness and understanding of the needs for the functional curriculum objectives. The tapes were presented to parents and students and used at in-service for teachers. They were also presented to other agencies and employers to increase awareness of needs and success potentials.

This part of the proposal took a lot of time and energy writing scripts, filming, editing and then scheduling showings and facilitating discussions around the content. It was a combined effort of Vocational Rehabilitation, private agencies, and the schools which carried on the original concept of the grant for community cooperation.

The second step, STRATEGIES, was to fund a school resource specialist to work directly with 1986 graduating students during the summer, to facilitate the transition from school to work. The work study liaison was employed for four weeks in the early summer and one week later in the summer and a special education senior graduating from the University of Wyoming was hired as a job coach.

Students were contacted by telephone, placed in various jobs and JTPA programs, and coordination with employers took place. Of the seventeen graduates, at the end of the summer six were in competitive employment, five in subsidized employment, and four in work training with two students still in the process of being placed.

The job coach was trained using slide presentations from Paul Wehman's program at the Virginia Commonwealth University and visits to local agencies and job sites. One moderately retarded student was coached extensively to learn new tasks, overcome fears, and work on communications skills. Transportation was provided by the job coach for several students using the school van.

A need for follow-up and ongoing case management of this kind was established as graduates would not have maintained or obtained employment

throughout the summer without support. The needs of students were apparent in time management--the difference between the school permitting students to be excused after the fact and the need for work supervisors to be informed before the absence or tardiness occurs. Transportation to work is also a problem without any public transport available in the area.

The third part of the proposal, CASE MANAGEMENT, involved continuing to meet with service providers to develop a case manager program using the information during the summer follow-up and to develop a plan to implement for the 86-87 graduates.

Participants investigated case management systems in other disciplines, such as mental health, rehabilitation, residential programs, and reported to the committee as a whole. The findings were: (1) no one agency or school could be totally responsible for transition case management; (2) there was no funding available to establish a new position of case management coordinator; (3) the school district already had coordination potential through the positions of two individuals--the Educational Resource Specialist and the Work-Study Liaison. The primary need was to identify other persons in local agencies who had a vested interest in working with transition and get a commitment from the to spend the time in this cooperative effort--THE TRANSITION TEAM.

The importance of "teaming" cannot be overstressed. A recommended plan for transition case management was presented to the planning committee, discussed and revised. A policy statement including a formal purpose statement and membership plan along with operating procedures was drafted. The design of the plan was to provide services, communication among service providers and follow-up to the client for an unspecified, unlimited, extended period of time.

SPECIAL NEEDS VOCATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Teamwork with vocational education and agencies has been facilitated by the district coordinator of vocational education who established an advisory committee in 1979 as required when using federal funds. Numerous in-service for vocational educators and special educators have been held with these federal funds to develop an understanding of the special needs of handicapped students in vocational areas.

With the encouragement of district special education specialists, the advisory committee became more than a rubber stamp but an active partner in improving vocational services to the handicapped. Under the chairmanship of the state EEO officer for the Bureau of Land Management the committee researched accessibility of programs, toured school resource rooms, TMR programs, work study sites, vocational classes for the handicapped, agencies that provided work adjustment, and invited teachers and job coaches to their meetings to tell of their concerns.

These activities made the community aware of how to work in partnership with the schools and caused the Special Needs Vocational Advisory Committee to be selected as the exemplary committee for Wyoming to be given a Presidential citation at a meeting in Washington, D.C.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT TEAMS

With recommendations from the advisory committee made after viewing the videotapes, implementation of the WHYTEP concerns for transition included development of guidelines in the Carl Perkins Act regarding a Career Development Plan. These provided the impetus for a sequence of activities to better prepare students for transition from school to work. A Model Services proposal was written to bring Dr. Tom Modahl from the University of Wisconsin/Stout to provide a seminar to help district teachers and agencies develop procedures for development of the career Plan. Small groups wrote a model IVEP/Career Development Plan format and guidelines and formulated a chart of vocational activities by grade level.

This chart outlines activities our district is trying to implement, beginning in the 7th grade with the enrollment of most handicapped students in regular shop and home economics classes for hands on career exploration. Students may also have other vocational objectives from the Resource Room Curriculum as specified by the Individual Education Plan (IEP).

In implementing the Carl Perkins Act requirement for writing a Career Development Plan for all students we have chosen to do this at age 14 or 9th grade when students are enrolling in high school which begins at 10th grade in our system. Plans are written for all students on an IEP.

All 9th grade students are given the Worker Trait Group Inventory in their social studies classes. Some handicapped students have taken the WRIOT or worked on the "Career Game". As they review the summaries of their chosen interests they begin to think about different traits, education levels, and skills involved in various jobs. It is at this point that we called together a career planning team for writing Career Development Plans/Individual Vocational Employment Plans for each student.

First, background information pertinent to vocational planning was collected on the form. The high school career counselor, the high school special education teacher, the student, his parents, current special education teacher, and transition specialist met to review the interest test, establish a first and second choice for a vocational goal and write goals for classes and training to be achieved in the high school. Specific objectives become part of the student's IEP. Copies of the plan were then placed in the student's cumulative folder, sent to the parent, and available to high school vocational and special education teachers. This makes for a rational basis for class selection at registration.

Conferences with Dr. Modahl assisting participants in developing specific objectives that can be written towards the selected goals on the IVEP were held. A handbook was printed using this information and distributed to all school district special education and vocational rehabilitation personnel in Wyoming.

In 10th grade most Resource Room students match their interests with their abilities by taking the Apticom test individually, or the Goodwill Vocational and Life Skills Evaluation contracted by the school district. The vocational teacher also provides data for assessment of the student's vocational potential.

WORK STUDY TEAMS

In 11th grade vocational skills are to be more specifically developed through activities which might include functional curriculum objectives in work behaviors, vocational classes, and work experiences.

Because of the lack of industry in our area, a mini-vocational class where students learn food service, duplicating and collating, filing skills, and custodial skills has been established. Federal funding also assisted in constructing a greenhouse for the moderately retarded students to raise seedlings to be planted around the schools in the spring and maintained during the summer.

Following the sequence of the K-12 curriculum from prevocational skills and vocational skills in classroom settings, we then placed the students in various jobs and watch them bloom as they gain confidence in a community or school district placement.

Work study Cheyenne style is highly individualized and does not follow a step by step program for each student. One student may start right in on a JTPA community placement, another might try some volunteer internships first. Excellent starter positions have been established through an in-district Student Occupational Service, S.O.S., where students work in the school laundry, graphics, bus garage, libraries, cafeterias, and custodial positions. After a minimal amount of training students are paid $3.50 an hour from district funds.

Teamwork with employers is ongoing. Cafeteria supervisors have participated in an in-service at one of their regular monthly meetings to discuss how to work with handicapped students. Information is given to employers and follow-up of students is frequent. Employers have been very willing to work with students, helping them build the skills and attitudes necessary for successful employment.

Two job coaches hired with Carl Perkins federal funding have been able to train students in both the school and community work sites when

needed. They assist with transportation as well, although the district buses can usually take students to and from work during regular hours.

Coordination with various outside agencies may also begin while a student is still in school. The district may contract with a rehabilitation agency to provide work adjustment, training, or sheltered work for part of the student's school day. Vocational rehabilitation may assist with some area that the school district cannot, such as medical costs, and always is available for consultation.

GRADUATION TRANSITION TEAMS

In 12th grade transition planning for after graduation culminates with a formal transition plan. As an ongoing service, all agencies that are involved in transition have been trying to involve the parent in planning through more awareness of options available. This year, they invited parents and students to a luncheon for discussion on services available. One parent commented on how she feels much better after seeing how all of the professional involved are networking to see that services will be given as needed. For so many years, she states, people have told her they didn't know what the future held for her child. Now she has several good choices. It is planned to expand parent involvement by continuing to offer such programs.

Transition meetings are held during the last semester for graduating students. All areas of concern are addressed along with vocational, because a job may not work out if living, transportation, and other needs are not met. The graduation transition team consists of the student, parent, special education teacher, vocational education teachers, job coach or job supervisor, and potential case managers from agencies to be involved after graduation. This one-page transition plan is added to the IVEP/Career Development Plan. Copies will be given to all involved and the parent and students are given a resource booklet on agencies that can be contacted, and advised of the role of the Community Transition Services Team of Laramie County.

CONCLUSION

At the first 9th grade career planning and graduation transition meetings held by the school district, the need for refinement of purpose and direction as well as more specific communication with student and parents at those meetings was clear. The special education teachers who were ultimately responsible had not been as involved as the planning committee. The committee had had several years to mentally prepare for "transition" meetings. The teachers were just beginning.

As implied in the word, "transition" is a dynamic process. This process has been clarified and detailed to the point that all members of the team now feel comfortable and apparently so do students, parents and teachers, in the sharing of information and the importance of the "rite of passage" for the transitional student.

The WHYTEP demonstration project has led to a continuum of services provided in a more timely way, easier access to information and diagnostics, and more successful placements for the disabled youth of Cheyenne and many other areas of Wyoming.

For the first time regular follow-up is being done as the Community Transition Services Team of Laramie County meets every three months to review the cases of graduated students and their transition plans. Members of agencies who are serving these students meet for lunch to do this review with school district resource specialists. Goodwill of Wyoming provides space for the files, sets up the meetings, keeps minutes, etc. They also have temporary funding for a case manager coordinator for the year.

Other efforts are continuing in Laramie County. The district office of Vocational Rehabilitation and School District #1 now have an agreement which addresses and outlines prevocational services, referral procedures, and services for rehabilitation, etc. The DVR agency in Wyoming has developed new policy and procedures for the entire state which facilitates better communication between all schools and the agency.

The transition team building project, "From School to Work" can be likened to building a bridge. Each piece must be firmly in place and the foundation must be strongly planted and welded to the structure. If one part is weak, the bridge will fall and you will be unable to use it to cross from one point to another.

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